

Pica**Definition/
cut-off value**

Current or recent craving for or ingestion of nonfood items including, but not limited to:

- C clay
- C starch (laundry and cornstarch)
- C dirt
- C ashes
- C paint chips
- C large quantities of ice
- C baking soda

**Participant
category and
priority level**

Category	Priority
Pregnant Women	IV
Breastfeeding Women	IV
Non-Breastfeeding Women	VI
Children	V

Justification

Pica is the craving for and eating of nonfood substances. Pica is linked to lead poisoning, anemia, excess calories or displacement of calories, gastric and small bowel obstruction, as well as parasitic infection. It may also contribute to other nutrient deficiencies by either inhibiting absorption or by displacing nutrient dense foods. It has been associated with a variety of poor pregnancy outcomes in women and lead poisoning in children.

Infants are not identified to be at risk for pica because developmentally, infants indiscriminately put numerous items hand-to-mouth.

WIC nutrition education and food can benefit the client by modifying the behavior.

**Clarification/
Guidelines**

Before assigning this risk code, be sure to document the non-food item on the diet/health history form.

The CA needs to differentiate between putting non-food items in the mouth versus the craving and consumption of non-food items. If the CA determines the child is consuming non-food items due to a craving, it is appropriate to assign this risk code, regardless of iron status.

References

Institute of Medicine: WIC Nutrition Risk Criteria: A Scientific Assessment; 1996; pp. 270-272.